

## Statement on Tornado Damage in Oklahoma and Kansas *May 4, 1999*

My heart goes out to the people of Oklahoma and Kansas who suffered through a night of terror and devastation. Some of the most powerful tornadoes ever recorded tore through these States last night, killing dozens of people, leveling whole neighborhoods, and leaving more than a thousand families homeless.

In the coming hours, I will declare several counties in both States Federal disaster areas, speeding the way for Federal aid. James Lee Witt, the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is now on his way to the region to assess the damage and to assure the

people of Oklahoma and Kansas that the Federal Government will provide whatever support is necessary to help them begin putting their communities back together.

Right now, our top priority is to make sure people are safe, that everyone is accounted for, and that initial cleanup can begin. Local and State officials, fire and police, emergency services, and National Guard personnel worked through the night and are doing an outstanding job of helping people through these most difficult hours. The thoughts and prayers of all Americans are with the victims of this tragedy.

## Statement on Signing Legislation To Award the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks *May 4, 1999*

I am proud to sign S. 531, a bill which authorizes me to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks.

Forty-three years ago, in Alabama, Rosa Parks boarded a public bus, took a seat, and began a remarkable journey. Her action that December day was, in itself, a simple one; but it required uncommon courage. It was a ringing rebuke to those who denied the dignity and restricted the rights of African-Americans. And it was an inspi-

ration to all Americans struggling together to shed the prejudices of the past and to build a better future. Rosa Parks' short bus trip, and all the distance she has traveled in the years since, have brought the American people ever closer to the promised land that we know it can truly be.

NOTE: S. 531, approved May 4, was assigned Public Law No. 106-26.

## Message on the Observance of Cinco de Mayo, 1999 *May 4, 1999*

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

It was 137 years ago today that General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin led an outnumbered and ill-equipped Mexican militia into battle. With brave hearts, they successfully defended their young nation and set a powerful example of hope and determination for freedom-loving citizens around the world.

Well over a century has passed since this battle, but we can still learn much from the Mexi-

can patriots who fought at Puebla. Their story reminds us to cherish our own independence and to honor those who struggled and sacrificed to attain it. It encourages us to stand up against injustice and to uphold our ideals. Finally, it shows us that brave men and women can overcome great odds when they are united in principle and purpose.

As we mark this special holiday, we also celebrate the enduring friendship between the United States and Mexico and the rich cultural

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heritage that Mexican Americans have brought to our society. As we stand at the threshold of the 21st century, let us vow to work together to forge a future of peace and prosperity for our hemisphere and the world.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a memorable celebration.

BILL CLINTON

## Remarks to the Community at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany *May 5, 1999*

Thank you very much. Secretary Cohen, thank you for your remarks and your remarkable leadership. We're glad that you and Janet are here with us today and there for the men and women of America's military services every day.

Secretary Albright, thank you for being able to redeem the lessons of your life story by standing up for the freedom of the people in the Balkans.

To the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton—I was looking at General Shelton standing up here—you know, he's about a head taller than I am. And I thought to myself, he not only is good; he looks good. He looks like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But what I want you to know is, however good he looks, he's better than that in the job that he does.

I thank General Clark for his leadership; Ambassador Kornblum; National Security Adviser Sandy Berger; our USAID Director, Brian Atwood, who is doing so much for the humanitarian relief. Brigadier General Scott Van Cleef, thank you. Chief Master Sergeant Daniel Keane, thank you for making all of us feel so welcome here today.

I'd like to thank the distinguished German public officials and citizens who are here. And I'd like to thank the Spangdahlem oompah band and the gospel choir. Thank you. I thank all the men and women of Team Eifel and all your family members who are here. I am delighted to see so many children here today. And I hope this will be a day they will long remember.

The 52d Air Expeditionary Wing is crucial to our mission in Europe. There are so many to thank: the Stingers and Hawks, the Panthers, your guests here, the crews of the Flying Knights, all the hundreds of base operations and support personnel here, working day after day

and now night after night. We ask so much of you, and you never let us down.

Ever since the end of the cold war, this base has been busy with the challenges of a new era, training new allies, planning new missions, helping people in need like the earthquake victims in Turkey whom the 52d Civil Engineer Squadron assisted last summer. A few years ago, you helped to end the cruel war in Bosnia. And I'm sorry you have to do it all over again, but I'm proud of the job you're doing today in Kosovo.

Earlier this year, some of you in the 22d Fighter Squadron flew support for Operation Northern Watch. Since this conflict in Kosovo began, we have been depending on you more than ever. It's meant more hardship and more hard work for you. Many of your loved ones are right now flying out of Italy, and of course, these F-117 stealth fighters and their crew are here from Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. And they're a long way from their families.

Night after night, crews fly out to Serbia, punching through enemy defenses; putting ordinance on target; returning home to debrief, rest, and then do it all over again. That takes courage and skill and a lot of support that we must never take for granted: refueling in midair; evading anti-aircraft fire; pinpointing targets; seeking, often at great personal risk, to avoid civilian casualties; coordinating with crews from other nations; rescuing a downed pilot, as one of your squadrons did just a few days ago; and for the base personnel and the loved ones, always the anxious waiting for the aircraft to return.

One thing I have tried to make sure the American people understand in the years that I have been President is that your jobs have inherent dangers, even when not directly engaged in conflict. As many of you now know,